

Holy Trinity Parish  
36th Street, N.W.,  
between N & O Streets  
(Georgetown)  
Washington  
District of Columbia

HABS No. DC-201

HABS,  
DC,  
GEO,  
137-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

ADDENDUM  
FOLLOWS...

## HOLY TRINITY PARISH

Location: Original Church (Convent of Mercy) - 3513 N Street,  
N.W. (Georgetown) Washington, D.C.

Present Church: 36th Street between N and O Streets,  
N.W. (Georgetown) Washington, D.C.

Rectory: 3514 O Street, N.W. (Georgetown)  
Washington, D.C.

Present Owners  
and Occupants: Roman Catholic Church (1969)

Present Use: Original Church - Living quarters for nuns teaching  
at nearby Holy Trinity Schools (1969).

Present Church - Holy Trinity Parish Church (1969).

Rectory - Holy Trinity Church Rectory (1969).

Significance: The original church, built in 1794, was the first  
place for public Catholic worship in the District of  
Columbia. The present church is a fine example of  
Classic Revival architectural. The rectory, with its  
mansard roof and elaborate woodwork, is similar to  
many structures built in Georgetown in the last third  
of the nineteenth century.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History

1. Dates of erection: Original Church (Convent of Mercy) - 1794  
Present Church - 1849-1851  
Rectory- 1869.
2. Architects: Original and present churches: None known.  
Rectory: Francis Stanton.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The original Church is in  
Square 1227, Lot 803 in Washington D.C. (formerly Square 57,  
Lot 72 in Threlkeld's Addition to Georgetown). The present  
church is in Square 1227, Lot 803 in Washington D.C. (former  
Square 57, Lots 74 and 72 in Threlkeld's Addition to  
Georgetown). The Rectory is in Square 1227, Lot 808 in  
Washington D.C. (formerly Square 57, Lots 78 and 83 in  
Threlkeld's Addition to Georgetown). The land on which the  
original church stands was bought by archbishop John Carroll  
from John Threlkeld in 1787 for five shillings (a virtual  
gift). The lot was 60' by 120' on the north side of Firs (N)  
Street between Fayette (35th) and Langan (36th) Streets.  
(Kelly).

4. Builder, contractor: Original Church - James Doyle. Mr. Doyle completed the church 1794, after delays because of financial problems. The church could not afford to pay his fees in cash, and instead provided rental pews as recompense. Mr. Doyle later willed his rental pews to Georgetown College in exchange for twelve years of tuition and board for his sons.
5. Alterations and additions:
  - a. Original Church - According to the Reverend Kelly, the parish historian, the church proved too small to accommodate the growing congregation and in the 1830s and 1840s

"Attempts were made first to widen it [the church], then to add to the length, but the results were unsatisfactory. Two confessionals were built alongside the church which were to be used also as vestries and sacristies. Arches were cut in the side walls and sheds erected. Finally an addition was built in the rear, greater than the original in depth...." (Kelly).

In 1851, after the present church was dedicated, the original church became a parochial school. In 1918, it became the Convent of Mercy and was remodelled for its present use as living quarters for the nuns who teach at the Trinity Grade School, on the corner of 36th Street and N Streets, and Trinity High School, at 1325 36th Street on the corner of O Street.
  - b. Present Church - Holy Trinity Church was one of the seven buildings in Georgetown that were converted into hospitals during the Civil War (Mitchell). Military guards, under the command of Captain Strong of Pennsylvania, were put in charge of the entire church property. Temporary flooring was built over the pews and sanctuary. (During the Army occupation the old church on First (N) Street was used for worshipers.) The church was restored to its original condition after the war, and received compensation from the government for its use and for repairs.
  - c. Rectory - In 1917, the Rectory was removed from its original location on the southeast corner of Lingan (36th) and Second (O) Streets to its present location on O Street. This was done to make room for the new Trinity schools, which were built on both sides of the church. (Kelly)

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

Although Father Neale began planning and soliciting for the church in 1791, building progress was delayed by financial difficulties. The building was completed and opened for services in 1794. According to a historian of the church, "there were no pews in the center of the Church until 1832. The open space was occupied by those who did not rent pews and by colored people. They sat on stools or benches or chairs which they brought from home." On January 1, 1795, the record shows that pews rented for seven shillings and sixpence a year. (Kelly).

The first marriage record occurs on January 1, 1794, for "David Thomas to Phyllis, a Negro Slave, property of Elizabeth Coyle of Georgetown." A month later the first baptism is recorded, "William James, son of James and Ann James, living in Georgetown." (Proctor).

Holy Trinity Church also served the community in secular ways. Georgetown College graduation and literary exercises were held in the church until 1832. (Kelly; Devitt)

Plans were made to build a new church on land which Father Neale and Georgetown College had acquired on the east side of Lingan (36th) Street from First (N) Street to Second (O) street. Father Peter O'Flanagan, whom Kelly calls the church's "Second Founder," was instrumental in organizing the drive for the new structure. Ground was broken in 1846 and the cornerstone laid in place by Archbishop Eccleston on July 8, 1849. The new church was dedicated on June 15, 1851. (Kelly).

In 1869 a permanent residence was erected for the Holy Trinity pastors and their assistants. Prior to that Father Neale and his staff had roomed and boarded at the College. During this period a small house on the south side of First (N) Street, which the College owned and used as a boys' school, was also the pastors' center for tending their parochial duties. In 1823 this house was converted into a residence for the priests when the boys vacated the building upon completion of Trinity School. Ten years later the "Residence of the Pastor and Assistants of Holy Trinity Church" was set up in the O'Donoghue house nearby on First (N) Street near the center of the block. This building, often dubbed "The White House" by the Fathers because of its color, remained the official pastoral residence until 1869, when the present structure was erected on the southeast corner of Lingan (36th) and Second (O) Streets.

Through the years, the Holy Trinity Parish Church has served Georgetown, and has been attended by many famous individuals including President and Mrs. John F. Kennedy.

C. Bibliography:

Devitt, Rev. Edward I., S.J., "Georgetown College in Early Days", Records of the Columbia Historical Society. Washington, D.C.: The Columbia Historical Society, 1909, vol. 12, p. 35.

Kelly, Lawrence J., History of Holy Trinity Parish. Baltimore, Maryland: John D. Lucas Printing Co., 1945.

Mitchell, Mary, Divided Town. Barre, Massachusetts: Barre Publishing Co., 1968.

Proctor, John Clagett, ed. Washington, Past and Present). New York, New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1930, Vol. II, p. 791.

Prepared by Volunteers for the Commission of  
Fine Arts  
Washington D.C.  
1969.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

ORIGINAL CHURCH (Convent of Mercy)

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: This late eighteenth-century building, originally Holy Trinity Church and now used by the Convent of Mercy, has been altered considerably. The regular spacing of windows on the sides has been interrupted by the introduction of similar additional windows and the removal of several others, yet the building still appears orderly and unified due to the overall painting and the regular rhythms of the cornice.
2. Condition of fabric: Good; reasonably well-maintained, although the paint on brickwork has weathered badly. (1969)

B. Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: Approximately 36' by 110', with a 12' tower at the center of the south front. Two stories high. Three bays wide by eight bays long.
2. Foundations: Brick to grade.
3. Wall construction: Brick, painted; shaped brick water table and corbelled brick caps on the stepped roof parapets.
4. Porches: On the north end of the east side is a two-story modern wood utility porch and stair, partially roofed over, serving as an auxiliary means of egress from the second floor.
5. Chimneys: None visible.
6. Openings:
  - a. Doors and doorways: The front entrance has a pair of three-panelled doors with a semicircular transom light above, made up of two circular panes and various irregular wedge-shaped panes. Panelled pilasters on each side support an arched cornice and a sign bearing the name of the convent, surmounted by a cross. A rear entrance at the northwest corner has a pair of doors with six vertical panels and a two-light transom. Chamfered pilasters and scrolled console brackets support a flat modillioned entablature.
  - b. Windows and shutters: Windows in general have six-over-six double hung wood sash, stone sills, and brick jack arches. One window above the main entrance has a semicircular head. At the attic level in the tower are boarded-up circular openings on the east, south, and west sides.
7. Roof:
  - a. Shape and covering: Low gable with stepped parapet ends; ridge running north to south; painted standing seam metal covering.
  - b. Framing: Wood (assumed).
  - c. Cornice: The wood cornice is made up of a large cyma recta above a broad soffit supported on regularly spaced carved scroll brackets with smaller carved modillions between, all mounted on a broad wood entablature.

- d. Tower: The twelve-foot-square masonry entrance tower extends just above the ridge line, at which point there is a bracketed and modillioned cornice similar to that on the main building. A very low pitched metal roof provides a transition to an octagonal wood clapboard belfry divided into two sections by a belt moulding; the lower section has horizontal rectangular louvers in each of the eight sides and the upper section has vertical rectangular louvers with gabled pediments in each of the eight sides. There is a smaller modillioned cornice above this and a low pitched metal roof with a large metal ball at the peak, surmounted by a cross.

#### C. Description of Interior

The interior of this building was not accessible to this researcher.

#### D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: Situated high above N Street, this former church building occupies the southwest corner of the Holy Trinity-Convent of Mercy educational complex. Its entrance front faces south toward N Street; and although it is located in a prominent position, it is overshadowed by the large red brick educational buildings across the street and adjacent on the west.
2. Enclosures: There is a wrought and cast iron fence along the top of the massive stone retaining wall along N Street; on the east is a high, plain board fence; on the west is a brick wall enclosing the paved area between the school and the convent.
3. Walks: Herringbone brick paving in front of the building, concrete and asphalt paving on west and rear. Steps up from the sidewalk are red sandstone.
4. Landscaping: Irregular low shrubbery is planted on the steep embankment from the top of the retaining wall to the lighter level of the brick-paved terrace, which has a few planting pockets in it.

Present Holy Trinity Church

A. General Statement

1. Architectural Character: This symmetrical building is a good example of the adaptation of the Greco-Roman temple form for use as a place of Christian worship. The simplicity of the exterior gives little indication of the elaborate decoration of the interior. Its light color and graceful proportions set it off from the darker utilitarian school buildings that flank it.
2. Condition of fabric: very good, well-maintained.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: Approximately 64' by 109', two stories high. The 36th Street facade is divided into five bays by rectangular pilasters; the outer two bays are blank, the next two have circular stained-glass windows at the second floor level, and the center one has the main entrance doorway. The center three bays form the back of a full height Ionic pedimented portico. The south side is divided into seven bays; the outer bays project 10" from the others to form small pavilions, the west bay has a doorway, the remaining bays have tall, semi-circular headed stained-glass windows. The north side is similar to the south, but reversed. The east end is divided into three bays with blind arches in them. There is a door low in the center.
2. Foundations: Stucco covers the masonry foundation walls to grade.
3. Wall construction: Ashlar-coursed stucco over masonry bearing walls.
4. Porches: The front portico has four Ionic columns of stucco over masonry with limestone bases and capital supporting a triangular pediment with a modillioned cornice, and large carved and gold-leafed "IHS" in the tympanum. The floor of the porch is concrete. Nine granite steps lead up from the sidewalk.

5. Chimneys: One, on the southeast corner.

6. Openings:

- a. Doors and doorways: Main entry has double three panel doors surmounted by a pediment supported on carved consoles, all in wood. There is a semi-circular stained glass transom light. The north and south entries have double three-panel doors with five-light transoms over wood architraves, and wood console-supported entablatures. Door sills are granite.
- b. Windows and shutters: Windows are generally tall, semi-circular leaded stained glass windows with wood and metal frames. There are two circular stained glass windows in the west facade. There are no shutters. All flat-bottomed windows have granite sills.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape and covering: Gable; metal standing seam roof; ridge running east-west.
- b. Framing: Wood trusses (assumed).
- c. Cornice: Classical wood cornice with modillions on both main building and pedimental portico. Concealed gutter.

#### C. Description of Interior

1. Floor plan: Although the church is basically one large space, there are confessionals the west wall on both sides of the entrance door, and there are small stair halls just inside both side doors. There are sacristies on each side of the altar area at the east end.

At the west end is a large balcony two bays deep, supported on two rows of ornamented cast iron columns. There is seating on both sides of the balcony, while the center is occupied by the organ, its console, and the choir area.

The basement was not accessible at the time of this writing.

2. Stairways: The two stairways leading to the balcony are in the northwest and southwest corners of the building. They begin with a series of winders at the outer corners, ascend along the west wall, and then turn again with a series of winders toward the east.

3. Flooring: Resilient tile under pews, carpet in aisles, white marble in the chancel area.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The general color of the interior is a warm gray, picked out in gold leaf. In the balcony the wainscot area is sponge-stippled with a slightly darker gray. The ceiling is coved, and the field area is coffered.
5. Doors and doorways: The interior vestibule doors are similar to those on the exterior except that they have glass in the upper panels.
6. Decorative features and trim: The center and side altars, pulpit, chancel rail, and floor are of white marble. Above the side altars are large niches, painted blue inside, containing statues. However, the dominating decorative element is the full-height Ionic order with full entablature complete with rinceau moulding in the frieze. Many of the mouldings are highlighted in gilt, as are the fluting and capitals of the pilasters and the rinceau in the frieze.
7. Hardware: Modern brushed aluminum and bronze; panic hardware on exit doors.
8. Lighting: Modern electric hanging fixtures and recessed lights.

#### D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: Situated in the middle of the block somewhat above the street, though not set back very far from it, the church dominates the east side of its block of 36th Street. It is surrounded by a variety of affiliated educational buildings.
2. Enclosures: There is a wrought-iron fence atop a stone retaining wall at each side of the main steps along the 36th Street facade. This fence continues to the corner of O Street, enclosing the adjacent school building.
3. Walks: Concrete paving surrounds the building.
4. Landscaping: Low shrubbery in front, paving on sides and rear; well-kept.

Holy Trinity Rectory

A. General Statement

1. Architectural Character: A large, square, free-standing building, this house forms an ideal transition from the residential-scale buildings along O Street to the school and church buildings adjoining it. The bold cornice, entryway, and roof structures contrast with the massive brick body of the building.
2. Condition of fabric: Good, well-maintained.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: Main block is approximately 40' by 38', two-stories high with a mansard story. There is a 12', two-story high brick addition across the rear of the main block, and a 10' by 30' enclosed sleeping porch across the rear of the addition at the second floor level. Main block has three bays across O Street facade and is four bays deep.
2. Foundations: Brick.
3. Wall Construction: Brick, except sleeping porch, which is stucco on frame.
4. Porches: Painted stone steps lead up to entry door.
5. Chimneys: Two on each side of main block.
6. Openings:
  - a. Doors and doorways: Front doors are a pair of heavy, two-panel leaves with deep mouldings opening into a vestibule, from which a pair of similar doors with glass in the arched top panels opens into the stair hall. There is an elaborate canopy above the segmental arched transom, supported by overscaled wood scrolls on each side. The woodwork in the vestibule has painted graining in some parts.
  - b. Windows and shutters: Windows in general are two-over-two-light double hung wood sash with plain painted stone or wood sills and straight, painted stone or wood lintels with a leaf-carved crown moulding across the top. There are no shutters, but traces of them remain. Dormer windows are two-over-two-light double hung wood sash.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape and covering: Steep mansard with hexagonal slates; top deck is probably painted metal, but was inaccessible.
- b. Framing: Wood.
- c. Cornice: Elaborate wood cornice with both brackets and modillions.
- d. Dormers: Three across the front, one double one between the chimneys on each side; wood with metal roofing.

C. Description of Interior

1. Floor Plan: There is a center stair hall which originally had two large rooms on each side. The northeast room has been divided by a wood and glass partition to form two smaller rooms, and the southwest has been completely partitioned to form a bath and a chapel. The brick addition across the rear contains a kitchen on the east and a dining room on the west. The basement also has a center hall plan, with various storage rooms opening off each side. The upper floors were inaccessible to the researcher.
2. Stairways: The stair has a straight run from north to south along the west wall to a landing the width of the hall, thence a shorter run from south to north to the second floor. This plan continues for the full height of the building. The newel and balusters are heavy turned wood, the handrail is heavy moulded wood, and each tread has an ornamental jigsawed scrolled bracked on the stringer. The basement stair is enclosed with narrow beaded boards, and is a simple wood open riser stair.
3. Flooring: Oak parquet for the most part; center hall and dining room carpeted; southeast office has linoleum covering.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls are painted plaster; ceilings in rooms are painted pressed metal, ceilings in stair hall, dining room, and kitchen are painted plaster.

5. Doors and doorways: Most doors have four panels, with upper two vertical panels glazed. There are several other types of nineteenth-century panelled doors in smaller openings.
6. Decorative features and trim: All mantelpieces have been removed and the fireplaces closed. Door and window trim is elaborately moulded and is about seven inches wide. The outer edge is undercut, giving a strong shadow line around the openings. Cornices, where they exist, are of pressed metal.
7. Hardware: Some modern mortise locks, a few old cast iron rimlocks, white china knobs.
8. Mechanical Equipment
  - a. Heating: Boiler in center front of basement; radiators throughout.
  - b. Lighting: All mid-twentieth century electric fixtures.

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: Located on the south side of O Street, the house is set off by driveways on each side. While the neighborhood is essentially residential, this building is part of a large school, church, and convent complex otherwise oriented toward 36th Street.
2. Enclosures: Chain-link and board fences around rear yard; wrought iron gates on the west between this building and the school building; wrought iron fences around planting areas at each side of front door.
3. Walks: Concrete.
4. Landscaping: Large foundation planting in area each side of the front door, paving around remainder of house.

Prepared by the Office of  
Walter G. Peter, Jr., AIA  
Architect  
November 20, 1968

PART II. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as part of a project to record structures in the western part of the Georgetown Historic District in Washington, D.C. The project was conducted by the Commission of Fine Arts with the cooperation of the Historic American Buildings Survey. The resulting documentation was donated to HABS by the Commission and published in 1970 in HABS Selection Number 6, "Georgetown Architecture Northwest: Northwest Washington, District of Columbia". Research for the project was conducted by volunteers under the supervision of Ms. Nancy Black, staff member of the Commission of Fine Arts. Architectural information was prepared by The Office of Walter G. Peter, Jr., AIA. The photographs were taken by J. Alexander. The data was edited and prepared for transmittal to the Library of Congress by HABS architectural historian Emily J. Harris in 1979.

ADDENDUM  
FOLLOWS...

Addendum to:

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